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## THE MEN WHO MADE ISRAEL

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### JOSHUA AND THE PROMISED LAND

35. Israel now stood on the borders of the Promised Land. The handful of tribes that had come out of Egypt had grown into a strong people. Clans, like the Kenites under the headship of Caleb, had joined the original body and the years of sojourn in the desert under Moses' training had produced out of these loose units a fairly well-organized confederacy united by its human leader in the worship of a common God and the hope of winning seats for settlement in the fairer regions of the west. Thither the memories of the past and the presence of their brethren invited them to advance.

36. The land of Canaan or Palestine is an irregular rectangle lying between the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Desert and stretching north and south from the Lebanon Mountains to the Southern Desert. Its length is about two hundred miles and its greatest width about one hundred miles. It is made up of a series of four parallel belts or sections running the whole length from north to south. The first and most western belt is the sea-coast which begins in the north where Mount Carmel looks out into the sea and leaves a strip of shore two hundred yards wide. It spreads out at the south into a broad plain rising in low hills to the mountains on the east. The second is the mountain ridge or plateau beginning with the Lebanons in the north and letting itself down to the desert on the south. It consists for the most part of a high plateau surrounded or cut through by hills. Its average height is more than two thousand feet and its breadth from fifteen to twenty miles. Right across the middle it is broken into two parts by a valley running from east to west, the plain of Esdraelon, which forms a passage way through it from the coast to the Jordan river. On the west the mountain feature sinks to the plain by a series of parallel foothills, but on the east it falls abruptly into a chasm which makes the third belt. This

is the valley of the Jordan river. The river rises at the foot of Mount Hermon at a point nearly five hundred feet above sea-level. It falls very rapidly through a distance of one hundred and twenty miles and empties into the Dead Sea, the lowest depth of which is about two thousand six hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean. This valley is a deep cut or landslide varying from ten to fourteen miles in width and bordered by two rocky side walls from eight hundred to two thousand feet high. Through this gorge, after broadening into two lakes, the Jordan hurries in a winding course to the sea. The fourth belt lies on the east of the Jordan and merges gradually into the Arabian desert. In the north it starts from Mount Hermon and in the south is bounded by the mountains of Edom. Plateau-like it stands on an average about two thousand feet high, broken by single peaks or irregular ranges of hills. Much of it is of volcanic formation. It slopes toward the west and its waters flow into the Jordan.

37. A country like this has great variety of scenery, soil, climate, and productions. Mountain and valley, sea-coast and desert, deep gorges and high peaks, give uncommon opportunity for differences of temperature, varying from tropical heat in the Jordan Valley to the everlasting snow of Mount Hermon. In a few hours it is possible to pass from one extreme to the other. The various forms of vegetable and animal life correspond to this physical variety. Lions are hunted in the thickets of Jordan, bears are found on the plateaus; in the ascent from the coast to the heights, a short journey, the gorgeous vegetation of the tropics gives way to the plants of the temperate zone, until you reach the summits of bare rock.

38. These differences of the land separated the inhabitants so that unity was not easy. The natural method was organization into petty states, each occupying a valley or perched upon a hill, each independent of the other, each struggling with the other for more territory. Other important facts in the geographical character of the land aided in keeping the states disunited and weak. There was first its position midway between Babylonia and Assyria, on the one hand, and Egypt on the other. These states looked upon the country lying between them as their natural prey and there enemies met on its soil to fight out the possession of it. Still further, it was easily entered from north to south or east. Armies came through the open

gateways between the mountains or along the sea-coast. The wandering tribes of the desert swarmed over the eastern border, swept through the valleys, and disappeared again whence they came or settled down in the seats of those they pillaged. Thus the country was never secure, never peaceful, always receiving new peoples and absorbing them, always liable to attack and conquest. There was no time or opportunity for organization on a large scale; the petty states had all they could do to hold their own or made the best terms they could with the steady stream of invaders.

39. A glance at the changes which had come over the country as well as at the situation just before Israel entered makes clearer these general statements. For two hundred years, from 1600-1400 B. C., Egypt had ruled over Syria as far as the Euphrates. But by the beginning of the fourteenth century the Arameans had come in from the east and the Hittites from the north and had broken down the Egyptian supremacy. The Hittites pushed Egypt back to the Lebanons and founded a kingdom in north and central Syria, which lasted till a new movement of wanderers from the north and northwest, called by the Egyptians the Sea Peoples, came down and broke it in pieces. The pharaoh of Egypt, Rameses III, about 1180 B. C., defeated them in the coast plain of Palestine and thus kept them from entering Egypt, but his successors were not able to hold Palestine. A part of these Sea Peoples, called the Philistines, settled down soon after on the plain at the southeast corner of the Mediterranean and grew into a vigorous state. The rest disappeared in the mass of Syrian peoples. Meanwhile the Arameans had been coming in from the east and gradually taking their places in the various sections. The forefathers of Israel were probably an early wave in this Aramean movement. In these centuries no national organization or political unity could have been maintained among the peoples of Palestine.

40. It was when these waves of migration and conflict had spent their force, about 1150 B. C., that Israel appeared on the eastern border of the land. The time was most favorable for successful invasion. Egypt had withdrawn her forces. The native states were weakened by the attacks which they had suffered from all sides. No one of the new powers had gained sufficient strength to rise above

the rest. And thus it came to pass that in the lifetime of one man Israel was able to enter the land, fix itself firmly upon the western plateau, and begin the task of making itself the master of Palestine.

41. This man was Joshua with whose name Hebrew tradition linked the conquest of Palestine. He was one of the new generation born amidst the desert life. Moses saw in him the qualities of leadership and attached him to himself, inspired him with his own ideals, and selected him as his successor to lead Israel into the Promised Land.

42. Not long after the death of Moses, probably, the advance began. The Book of Joshua opens abruptly with the command of Jehovah bidding Joshua prepare the people for crossing the Jordan.<sup>1</sup> At the point where the river empties into the Dead Sea the valley widens out into a broad plain from which the roads lead up to the plateau. Here on the west side of the river the most considerable city was Jericho. It was a city-state under a king, rich and powerful, strongly fortified, and a formidable obstacle in the way of Israel's movement. The river must be crossed and Jericho fall before even the first steps could be taken in the ascent to the plateau.

43. Wonderful stories were told of Israel's overcoming these difficulties. Joshua sent spies across the river who even entered Jericho and returned safely with their report that fear had fallen upon their enemies. Then the advance began. As the people reached the banks of the Jordan, Jehovah halted the waters of the stream so that they passed over dry shod in the river bed and encamped at a place called Gilgal, a few miles east of Jericho. Then followed the downfall of Jericho. After laying siege to it the armed men one day at the command of Jehovah marched round the city with the ark of Jehovah in the midst of them. They repeated this daily until the seventh day when they marched around the city seven times. Then as the people shouted with a great shout the walls of the city fell.

<sup>1</sup>The Book of Joshua, like the other historical books of the Old Testament, is made up by a selection from a variety of sources early and late which contained the stories of the conquest. Even the earliest of these sources comes from a time separated by centuries from the events recorded. A strong religious spirit animated it. This spirit led the compilers to choose those scenes and events which most strikingly exalted the presence and activity of Jehovah and showed the fulfilment of his will. The later stories naturally heightened the significance and enlarged on the details of such episodes. Hence it is difficult to find a satisfactory order of events, to determine their relations and to discover the original form of the actual historical occurrences.

The inhabitants were slaughtered and the spoil devoted to Jehovah by being burned with fire. Only Rahab the harlot who had sheltered the spies was saved with her family and her goods. Then Israel returned to Gilgal and prepared for the march upward.

44. Differences now appeared the causes of which are not hard to understand. Moses, whose strong personality had held the tribes and families together, was dead and Joshua had neither his prestige nor his power. With wives and children the men longed speedily to settle down. Israel's advance was a migration as well as an invasion. Already some of the tribes had found homes in the east Jordan land. Thus, from this time Israel no longer advances as one body. Some kind of a division of territory seems to have been made; Judah and Simeon separated from the rest and took the southern passes which led up into Southern Palestine, to occupy the district later known as Judah. There they disappear from view for a long time. The others followed Joshua up the northern road on to the central plateau where new struggles awaited them, the order of which we cannot clearly follow. A dash from Gilgal captured the city of Ai after a temporary repulse ascribed to the sin of Achan (Josh. 7). The city of Gibeon secured by deceit the promise of alliance and an attack upon it by other Canaanite cities brought Joshua to its relief. A great battle was fought at Beth-horon a thrilling episode of which was handed down in a song preserved from the Book of Jashar. Night began to fall as Israel put the enemy to flight and Joshua cried out:

Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon

And, thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.

And the tale went down in Israel that the sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.

45. The victory of Beth-horon gave Joshua a footing in the midland. Thence he seems to have advanced northward and taken possession of Shechem in the region which afterward was the seat of the tribe of Ephraim. We are told also of a battle in Ai far north by the waters of Merom where Jabin of Hazor was smitten by him and Israel's position in that district secured. The stories of these battles show them to have been won by the furious charges of Joshua's warriors. Fierce and terrible indeed must have been the onrush of this wild bedouin horde upon its foe. It is not strange that the

peasants and farmers of the upland trembled at the news of their coming. Only the strong walls of fortified cities could withstand them. All the rest of the country fell before their savage assaults directed by the skilful generalship of their leader.

46. Thus before Joshua passed away the first stage of Israel's conquest was complete. Armed resistance was overcome. Comparatively few in numbers but with native vigor, inspired by simple religious faith, Israel was master in the Promised Land. That they found allies and friends other than the Gibeonites is quite probable, and they were doubtless greatly aided by the disorganized and disunited condition of the population. But it is Joshua's glory that he was the center and soul of this movement and brought it to final success. The spirit that stirred him is beautifully illustrated in a story of the early days of the advance. As he stood before Jericho a man met him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua rushed upon him only to find that it was Jehovah come to lead his hosts to victory. And Joshua put his shoes from off his feet, for the place on which he stood was holy. He had seen God and knew that Jehovah was the true captain of Israel's armies.

47. The next step after the conquest was the division of the land among the victors. For Israel had no formal unity to maintain and every tribe wanted its own territory to which to bring its wives and little ones and make its home. So they separated. We are told that Joshua assigned by lot the various districts to the several families and tribes and that before they separated he warned them to be faithful to Jehovah and made a covenant with them to obey his commands. He himself was an Ephraimite and when all was done went to his own district of Timnath-serah where he died in a ripe old age. Israel's hardest tasks yet remained to be done but Joshua had finished his work. His name went down in story among the heroes of Israel, the one who brought the work of Moses to splendid fulfilment in making Israel master of the Promised Land.